

Minutes of DAAC Meeting

Call to Order

Co-Chair Seren Derin called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

Attendance

DAAC members present were Seren Derin, Dana Goddard, Jim MacRostie, Joan Rising and Joe Tringali

Others present were; Irene Barrelet, future member of the DAAC; Gerry Weiss, Select Board; Roy Rosenblatt, Human Services; Bonnie Weeks, Building Commissioner, Nate Malloy and Carolyn Holstein DAAC staff liaisons, and a member of the public, Jane Gamache.

Membership

Future member Irene Barrelet was introduced to the Committee. Ms. Barrelet said that she works for D.E.A.F, Inc. and is a provider for the deaf/blind. She is interesting in accommodating her clients under ADA requirements and for pushing Verizon to provide Braille TTY (Teletypewriter) machines to those in the community who need it, especially in case of an emergency.

The DAAC welcomed Ms. Barrelet, but noted that until the previous member, Madeline Peters, resigns in writing, not just via the email she sent, Ms. Barrelet cannot officially become a member of the DAAC. The Committee asked Mr. Weiss if a hand-written signature on a resignation letter is cast in stone, and whether the policy for resignations could be relaxed. Mr. Weiss said that he would look into relaxing the policy for resignations.

Nate Malloy was introduced to the DAAC. He will be the staff liaison, beginning in November.

Minutes

Minutes from the September, 2008 meeting were discussed. Ms. Derin noted that her name was misspelled. No other corrections were found. Mr. Goddard made a motion to accept the minutes as corrected; Mr. Tringali seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous to accept the September, 2008 meeting as corrected.

Election of Officers

Ms. Derin said that without Ms. Peters as co-chair of the committee, an election of new officers would be necessary.

At this point, the staff liaison took over the meeting for nominations of officers.

1. Mr. Tringali nominated Ms. Derin as Chair of the DAAC. No other nominations were made; the vote was unanimous to elect Ms. Derin as Chair of the committee.
2. Ms. Derin nominated Mr. Tringali as Vice-Chair of the DAAC. No other nominations were made; the vote was unanimous to elect Mr. Tringali as Vice-Chair of the committee.
3. Ms. Derin nominated Ms. Barrelet to be Clerk of the DAAC when she is appointed to the committee. No other nominations were made; the vote was unanimous to elect Ms. Barrelet as Clerk of the committee.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

Mr. Rosenblatt, staff for the Community Development Committee addressed three projects using CDBG money that are relevant to the DAAC.

1. The repair of the Main Street sidewalk on the south side. The Watson Farm driveway and sidewalk adjacent to the new Housing Authority housing will be repaired with the current CDBG money. The rest of the sidewalk from East Street to Churchill Street next to the Police Station will be part of the next CDBG application. The length of that stretch of sidewalk is less than one mile. The goal will be to remove barriers along the sidewalk so that folks with disabilities can walk or wheel along the sidewalk from the Village Center at East Street to the downtown area.
2. Pomeroy Lane. The Planning Department and the DPW plan to modify the Village Center at West Street and Pomeroy to make the intersection more accessible. The existing sidewalk will be modified and extended, plus there will be crosswalks with crossing signals and curb cuts. This project will also be part of next year's CDBG application. This Village Center is one of the target areas of the Town's Comprehensive Plan.
3. The North Amherst old school that houses Head Start and the Survival Center is being repaired with current CDBG money. The State requires all entrances to be accessible if repairs are greater than 1/3 the cost of the building. However, a new handicapped ramp in the front of the building would be almost impossible to build or use, given the steep steps in front, and it is not accessible by vehicle in any case. The back entrance has a ramp and lift, and is accessible by vehicles, so it is currently the main entrance to the Head Start program on the first floor of the building. The Survival Center on the lower floor has accessible entrances on both the south and north sides of the building. The Architectural Access Board (AAB) considers the front the main entrance, but would consider granting a variance from the ramp requirement if the DAAC supports such a variance.

The DAAC discussed all three projects and supported all three. They also agreed that a ramp in the front of the North Amherst School would not be helpful in terms of accessibility.

The DAAC voted unanimously to recommend approval of a Variance from the AAB to not build a ramp, but with three conditions: (1) that there be additional lighting for the driveway, the front of the building and the accessible entrance at the back of the building, (2) signs for the Survival Center and Head Start program be placed in a visible location, and (3) the addition of marked handicapped parking places in the parking lot of the building.

Visitability

Building Commissioner Bonnie Weeks spoke with the DAAC about the issue of requiring that an entrance and the first floor of new construction be built with one zero-step entrance and all main interior doors have at least 32 inches of clearance, including at least one half-bath with wheelchair maneuvering space.

Mr. Tringali distributed an article dated February 2004 about Visitability, with information gathered from the University of Buffalo and the Concrete Change website. The article states that if planned in advance, the typical added cost can be very low. It also listed 5 cities in the country that have

local mandatory requirements for Visitability for new single family homes. The cities are in parts of the country with more level – AZ, IL, FL, TX and NY

Ms. Weeks agreed with Mr. Tringali that visitability is a positive step, but repeated what had been said earlier: any local ordinance cannot be more stringent than the State Building Code in Massachusetts; it is illegal. Historically, towns in Massachusetts had individual codes, but the State wanted uniformity and the Mass. General Laws require that all cities/towns follow the same Building Code—the State Building Code.

Ms. Weeks said that the current State Building Code requires a 6-inch difference between the ground and any exterior entrance to a house, and that the ground slopes away from the house. This can be modified for accessibility to meet the Architectural Access Code, which is more strict than the Building Code. The AAB and State Building Code are not the same.

Ms. Rising explained about the accessibility to her house, which has no steps into the front door, a ramp in the garage and all doorways with 32 inches of clearance. She said that there is an Institute for Universal Accessibility in Hadley. There also is a home store in Whately that supplied all the pre-fabricated parts for her house, she said.

Ms. Weeks suggested that, even though visitability cannot be required by law, it can be promoted via “Smart Homes” which has franchises all over the country, or through the Home Builders Association. Visitability (aging in place) can be a marketing tool, such as Green Building or R19 for insulation. Education of the public is important for Visitability to be a desired building feature.

Ms. Holstein suggested that perhaps the Zoning Bylaw could be changed to give permitting points for Visitability, much like the awarding of points now for inclusion of affordable units in subdivision plans.

Future agenda items

The DAAC agreed that they would talk about the train station in Amherst at their next meeting because currently it is not accessible. It was suggested that committee members and staff liaison make a site visit to the train station prior to the next meeting.

Meeting times

The committee discussed changing their meeting day and time again. A high priority would be to accommodate the Select Board liaison Mr. Weiss’s schedule. Mr. Malloy said that he would try to find a day of the month that could accommodate the DAAC as well as Mr. Weiss.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m. The **Next Meeting** will be November 18th, at 3 pm, Room 101 Bangs Center.

Respectfully submitted,
Carolyn Holstein, (former) staff liaison